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## IDENTITY PERCEPTION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND NATION-STATE BUILDING: CASE OF UZBEKISTAN

The Central Asian states since their independence in 1991 became the area of interest of regional studies of International Relations. The fact that the Central Asia is a “heartland” of in the geopolitical sense as it was defined by the English geopolitical expert G. Mackinder, its location in the so-called “World Island” and as well as its geographical location are the main factors determining the place of the region in international relations system. The nations living in the region of Central Asia, which were dominated by the great empires in history, has experienced a number of difficulties during the transition period of the post-Cold War era such as nation building, national identity perception and state building.

It is important to understand the difference between the national identity perception of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, which were imposed externally during Soviet times, and the national identity concept they acquired with independence. In particular, it is a serious necessity in terms of regional integrity and security to examine the factors that are important in the state building process in Uzbekistan.

**Key words:** Central Asia, Identity, Nation, Nation-State Construction.

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### Орталық Азия және ұлттық құрылыс мәселелерінде бірегейліктің қабылдануы: Өзбекстан мысалында

1991 жылы тәуелсіздік алғаннан бастап, Орталық Азия мемлекеттері халықаралық қатынастарды аймақтық зерттеуге қызығушылық тудырғаны тарихтан белгілі. Белгілі ағылшын геосаяси маманы Дж.Макиндер Орталық Азияның мемлекеттері геосаяси мағынадағы «жүрек» екендігін айқындаған. Оның пікірінше, Орталық Азия мемлекеттерінің жер шарының «әлем аралы» деп аталатын жерінде орналасуы, сондай-ақ оның географиялық орналасуы аймақтың халықаралық қатынастар жүйесіндегі орнын анықтайтын негізгі факторлар болып табылады. Тарихта ұлы империялар үстемдік еткен Орталық Азия аймағындағы мемлекеттерде өмір сүретін халықтар қырғи-қабақ соғыстың аяқталуынан кейінгі өтпелі кезең ішінде ұлт құру, ұлттық бірегейлікті қабылдау және Тәуелсіз дербес мемлекет құру, оны қазіргі заманғы әлем тарихындағы мемлекеттермен тең қалыптастыру сияқты бірқатар қиындықтарды бастан өткерді.

Кеңес Одағы кезінде Орталық Азияның Қазақстан, Қырғызстан, Өзбекстан, Түркменстан және Тәжікстан сияқты мемлекеттерінде ұлттық бірегейліктің қабылдануы мен тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейінгі ұлттық бірегейлік концепциясы арасындағы ұғымдардың айырмашылығын түсіну маңызды. Атап айтқанда, аймақтық тұтастық пен қауіпсіздік тұрғысынан Тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейінгі Өзбекстандағы мемлекеттік құрылыс процесінде маңызды факторларды зерделеу қажет.

**Түйін сөздер:** Орталық Азия, бірегейлік, ұлт, ұлттық-мемлекеттік құрылысы.

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### Восприятие идентичности в Центральной Азии и национальном строительстве: на примере Узбекистана

Государства Центральной Азии с момента обретения ими независимости стали областью интересов региональных исследований международных отношений. Тот факт, что страны Центральной Азии являются «сердцем» в геополитическом смысле, как это было определено английским геополитическим экспертом Дж. Макиндером, его расположение на так называемом

«острове мира», а также географическое положение являются основными факторами, определяющими место региона в системе международных отношений. Народы, живущие в регионе Центральной Азии, в котором доминировали великие империи в истории, испытывали ряд трудностей в переходный период, в эпоху после окончания холодной войны, таких как построение нации, восприятие национальной идентичности и государственное строительство.

Важно понимать разницу между восприятием национальной идентичности в странах Центральной Азии, таких как Казахстан, Кыргызстан, Узбекистан, Туркменистан и Таджикистан, которая была навязана извне в советское время, и концепцией национальной идентичности, которую они приобрели после обретения независимости. В частности, с точки зрения региональной целостности и безопасности крайне необходимо изучить факторы, которые важны в процессе государственного строительства в Узбекистане после приобретения независимости.

**Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, идентичность, нация, национально-государственное строительство.

## Introduction

Since the day they declared their independence, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the Central Asian states, started the process of identity construction. In the meantime, it is important to note that there are also external factors in the identification of the Central Asian nations. The role of identity perception imposed during Soviet times has a great role in the process of state building. In other words, in the nation building process, there were some internal problems as well as external factors. In the meantime, it is possible to say that peoples living in Central Asia as a result of Soviet policies of Soviet identity construction has very weak perception of nation. Concerning the internal problems, the states in the search for post-independence identities, faced the problems such as religion, language and tribal identities. These problems, which prevent the establishment of the new Central Asian republics as national states, have caused some problems in the nation-building policies. The first of these problems is the borders between the Central Asian republics drawn in the time of the Soviet Union which were drawn only for political purposes without taking into consideration the ethnic identities of the people of the region. In other words, there is the Uzbek region remained within the borders of Kazakhstan and while there is the Kazakh regions in Uzbekistan. The same can be said for Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The Fergana valley with its multiethnic composition is another problem of the region. These problematic boundaries have drawn a border in the minds of the Central Asian nations as well. The identity perceptions, which were adopted in the Soviet times with the emphasis on ethnic and cultural differences, from time to time have caused ethnic conflicts between the states of Central Asia. For this reason, the states in the region have initiated and have taken various steps both in their internal politics and in the process of establishing an identity

in the regional integration processes. The perception of identity in the Central Asian countries is always of interest to the experts doing research on the region. In the modern international relations system or in the process of globalization, the study of identity as one of the factors that nation-states are based on is a result of a state policy to protect nation's own existence. As İkbal Vurucu argues in his book that it is a result of modernism that identity became an object of research in cultural sciences as a problem. (Vurucu 2010: 32)

As usual, the newly established state needed a new collective identity of its own. Collective identity, in modern sense, reflects the peculiarity, feelings of belonging, consciousness, emotion and uniqueness of an ethnic group (ethnic communities) in a given area (territory). In this context, language, culture, religion, history, living space, material conditions as well as common memory, experienced and internalized past is very important. (Alakel 2011: 14)

In the process of globalization, while nation-states have been losing their existence as the actors of international relations, the role of state-building and identity, in the process of integration or, in correct terms, in the process of "unsuccessful integration" among the Central Asian republics, are increasing. Nation-state, as a political organization model for almost all countries of the present international relations system, has developed differently in the process of state building in Central Asia due to the historical, cultural and traditional characteristics of the region. Why the article deals with the case of Uzbekistan is due to the fact that the country has the most homogenous population, demographically the population is increasing very rapidly, was able to conduct a successful national policy in terms of constructing its own culture and language from the first years of independence in comparison with other regional states. Because the new nation-states were the product of Stalin's national policy, the au-

tocratic governance structure of the Soviet Union was influential in shaping the basis of the nation-state building of the Central Asian countries since beginning. At this point the truth is that the nation-states in Central Asia, the administrative structure based on the authoritarian regime that developed and institutionalized in parallel with its birth, and its transformation are the main axes of political and legal change after independence.

### 1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:

To the question of why we should use a theory in an academic study, Waltz, who is the most cited theoretician of international relations, states: Theories can explain laws, but they can never prove reality. The theory, in addition, defines terms and concepts by proposing assumptions for research, and helps research by pointing out the relationship between them. In this context, since the only studies appropriate to the standards of philosophy can be called as science, the theory helps us how to achieve what is necessary without drowning in details. (Nogayeva 2011: 13).

#### *Identity*

Identity in international relations theory is a central phenomenon that constitutes “the cultural basis” of the method and explanation style it uses to understand the world. While in modern times, this phenomenon was revealed as the East-West, modern-traditional, scientific-traditional etc., the war between civilizations today is functioning as the epistemic founding element of discourses such as cultural globalization, Islam as an enemy, terrorist, and “the other. (Keyman 2012: 41)

Identity is the characteristic features that determine the personality of a person or the difference of a group from the others. (Kekevi 2012: 1185) In this context, language, culture, religion, history, living space, material conditions as well as common memory, lived and internalized common past is very important. (Alakel 2011: 14) In this respect, although Central Asian states from outside are defined as nations that have common culture, history, religion and similar characteristics, they have different conception of identity that excludes each other. For this reason, the identity perceptions of the Central Asian nations are not alike and each nation sees itself as different from the other. In an environment where globalization, which influenced the international system as a global trend in the post-Cold War era, and erased the lines of distinction between national and international fields, and when the classic nation-state necessitated the new post-modern redefinition;

the state building and national identity construction processes of the Central Asian republics, which gained their independence by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, are accompanied by the fundamental contradictions and disputes contained in this general context. (Musaoglu 2009: 469).

#### *Nation-State*

Although the concept of nation-state has been explained by intricate events from the historical medieval age, it is a general acceptance that it emerged legally in the first half of the eighteenth century. (Uğuz 2016: 128) Nation-state is a political form established by a human society with the same ethnicity, cultural motifs and historical background. (Uğuz 2016: 129) The nation-state model was first introduced in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and has spread globally since the second half of the twentieth century. It is possible to say that the states which have existed for nearly two centuries have been taking the form of nation-state and this is also true for Central Asian countries. (Khairmukhammedov 2008: 1) But in order to make the definition of the nation-state, the concepts of nation and state must be dealt separately.

There is no clear definition of the concept of nation which is generally agreed on. The reason for this is the multidimensional and flexible nature of this concept. Explaining the cultural, political, economic and psychological dimensions of the concept of nation within these fields by experts of these fields also makes it difficult to define concept. For example, while Benedict Anderson, a US political scientist, defined the nation as an imagined political community that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign, thus bringing a political explanation, British sociologist Anthony Giddens elaborated sociological approach and defined nation as a unity that is subject to a holistic rule, controlled by the internal elements of the state apparatus and as well as by other states and established on the territory determined by certain borders. (Çağlar 2018: 62)

Bernard Lewis says that the word “millet” came from Aramaic word “milla”, literal meaning is “a word”, which historically acquired the meaning of “a group of people accepting a holy book.” In line with the religious meaning in its etymology, the word, nation “refers to human societies who believe in the same religion, while the word “ulus” from Mongolian origin which is used as an equivalent of the concept of nation refers to a different ethnic group. Roskin, on the other hand, claims that the Latin word nation (unlike its current meaning) means the common genealogy. In the contemporary Latin dictionary “nation” has the meaning of birth, race, and

class. The word and the concept of “nation” are centered on political and philosophical individualism and it has a meaning only in modern democracies. In this sense, the nation is a phenomenon belonging to the modern period and has gained meaning with modernism. From a sociological point of view, nation refers to the process of standardization of local cultures that is consolidated as an upper culture by the support of central government together with the overlapping processes of cultural, economic and political systems on the same sphere of culture and sovereignty. From political point view, the nation represents both a group formed as a community of individuals and a political individual vis-a-vis other nations. According to Michel Foucault, in the historical process, the state is no longer expressing itself as a subject, but something else stands out as the subject of historical narrative. The name of this thing is nation. Concepts such as nationality, race, class are evolving around this concept of nation. (Aydin 2018: 232)

There are three different theories about the definition and formation of the nation. The first is the modernist approach that sees the nation as a “constructed community” which was a result of the economic changes in the West. The second is the Primordial approach which sees the nation as a “given” phenomenon. The third is the ethno-symbolist approach which stand between the modernist approach and the primordialist approach. (Kaya 2012: 355)

In order to categorize the studies carried out to make the definition of the state, we can say that five different definitions have been made that highlight the different dimensions of the state; i. legal/legitimate dimension, ii. historical dimension, iii. sociological and anthropological dimension, iv. political dimension, v. philosophical and normative dimension. The perception of the state emphasizes the different aspects of the state. Therefore, the definition of the state is diversified according to the preferences of the person making the definition. However, it is widely accepted that the state has traditionally been defined in constitutional law or political science by three elements. According to this definition, which was first conceived by Georg Jellinek in 1900 and also known as the Three-Element Theory, state is a form consisting of a human community, land/geographic area and sovereignty. The Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States, signed in 1933, has a significant share in widely acceptance of the definition in the studies of International Relations. According to the article 1 of the Convention, which is signed by twenty states, it is considered to be the four qualifications that the state must bear

in order to be accepted as a subject of international law. These are listed as the permanent population, the boundaries of the space (territory), the government and finally the capacity to be engaged with other states (recognition). (Özlük 2012: 74)

After the definition of the nation and the state separately, it is easier to define the nation-state. The nation-state is the state model of individuals, which is organized according to the principle of self-determination and national institutions. The nation-state is the political form of the human community with the same ethnicity, cultural motifs and historical background. (Uğuz 2016: 129)

When the details of the nation as the social background of the nation-state are analyzed, it is seen that the political authority aims to integrate community through the elements such as culture, history and origin and especially by means of common language. (Khairmukhanmedov 2008: 28)

As we know, there are two types of nation-states: federal states and unitary states. In a sense, federal states are less nation-states due to the fact that they are less centralized.

#### *Historical Background of the Research Subject*

Efforts to create national identity in Central Asian nations go back to the Tsarist Russia period. The 1917 Revolution in Tsarist Russia revived the sense of freedom and national identity in Central Asian Muslims. On 2 November 1917, the Bolshevik government adopted “the declaration on the rights of the peoples of Russia”. In this declaration, equality of all peoples and national sovereignty are mentioned. The Central Asian intellectuals and politicians attempted to establish their national state by benefiting from the rights and law that the declaration provided. (Tacibayev 2012: 192) With the initiative of the politicians and intellectuals of the region, with the help of the local politicians in the region, firstly, within the Russian Federation, in May 1918, then within the USSR, the foundation of the Turkistan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (30.04. 1918-27.10.1924) was laid. (Tacibayev 2012: 192) In other words, the attempts to create national identities in these states started in the period of Tsarist Russia, Russian Federation and then in the USSR. In March 1920, the Regulation on Turkestan Autonomy” was published by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. According to the regulation, Turkestan is an autonomous republic of the peoples which is divided to provinces according to the economic and family lifestyles and national groups and is called as “the Turkestan Autonomous Republic of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic”. On 11 April 1921, the Autonomous Re-

public of Turkestan was registered as the Turkistan Soviet Socialist Republic with the decision of All Russia Central Executive Committee. This document is of historical importance in the development of Turkestan people as the national Soviet republic. The Turkestan republic has been a multinational republic where nations such as Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, Karakalpak etc. live together. However, the Communist Party regime redefined the definition of the peoples of Central Asia with the identity of Turkistan because of its own Pan-Turkic phobias. The definition of nations with Turkic identity under the name of Turkistan was considered to be a great danger for the Soviet Union. Therefore, the regime set the purpose of adopting Central Asian states as separate and different identities such as the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic etc. The geographic boundaries of the states have been drawn with the intention of triggering the possible conflicts between the regional states in terms of ethnicity and identity in the future.

According to Özgün Erler, Central Asian countries have not experienced the pains and struggles of state building in their natural process. They were established as a state by the Soviet Union in the 1920s and their organizational structures were established under the umbrella of the unity. Without a struggle for freedom, they gained independence as a result of the spontaneous dissolution the union and sudden withdrawal of Russia in 1989. There was no struggle here either. In this context, it is very difficult to explain the new nation-states that emerged with the dissolution of the union by the formation of the Western type nation-state, which is a product of capitalism and modernization. In the West, nation-states have emerged as a result of certain struggles and conflicts. Each country established its national unity through a long process. The starting point of these processes is industrialization and capitalism. The cultural homogeneity required by the capitalist system became possible by the organization of the nation-state after the industrial revolution. Nationalism was born as a requirement of this process, which began under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. In order to achieve industrial development, it was necessary to keep human communities together under the umbrella of the nation state, which was possible with the ideology of nationalism. In the Soviet Union, in the communist system which has a completely different logic and internal operation, these processes did not evolve in this way. Nationalist movements in Central Asian countries have also gained momentum on the basis of “re-building of nation” and have shown a tendency to develop

along with the efforts of these countries to take part in international politics as independent actors. Ethnic nationalism is dominant in Central Asia in micro level. The development of separate sub-identities and micro-nationalisms undermine national supra identities. In this region, apart from the fact that there is ethnic interlocking from one state to another, the fact that sociological structures such as family, tribe and clan, which were strengthened by the Soviet practices, cannot be broken and the effect of Islam on social organizations make it difficult to achieve national unity. The people in the region tend to identify themselves with their family, tribe and clan affiliations. This reality makes it difficult for the countries of the region to consolidate their peoples around common feelings, thoughts and purposes. (Erler 2007: 137)

The social and political policies implemented during the Soviet Union also help us understand the structure that exists in the region today. The national and ethnic identities living in the region were suppressed by the dominant Soviet socio-economic system and ideology whose objectives and policies were “to create upper identity” and “unite all nations under one system”. The development of local languages and education in these languages were not allowed in the union republics, higher education was predominantly given in Russian, national languages could not be used as an official language, and ethnic composition was changed by placing Russian populations in each republic, the country’s rulers were chosen from those who showed high commitment and loyalty to the Central Communist Party and the Soviet Union. Only with the dissolution of the union, the “Soviet upper identity” was eliminated and a vacuum emerged. This evaluation leads to an assessment that the ethnic identities that were suppressed previously appeared on the grounds after the ideological changes occurred and the vacuum emerged, and that the nationalist movements in Central Asian countries should be examined within this framework. (Erler 2007: 138).

According to Oliver Roy, the logic of the new states was to invent a legitimacy that was absolutely nationalistic, but not broken from the Soviet era, which was part of their legitimacy because of the birthplace of new republics. After independence in Central Asia

there is an attempt to purify the society from the impacts of the Russification, which was carried out politically and sociologically during the Soviet era. One of its natural consequences or methods is nationalism. Language policies play an important role respect. Oliver Roy, who described the post-

independence nationalism orientation in Central Asia “the invention of the national state”, says the following about language policies: “To be able to pursue a career before independence, regardless of ethnicity, the person had to graduate from Russian schools. The levels of these schools were higher. Russian was prestigious and management language. Although Russian language continued to maintain its weight after independence, national languages came to the fore. Support for national languages continued ranging from reforms to the change of the alphabets. In these efforts, the main axes were de-Russianization and nationalization. Within the framework of these policies, it was tried to purify the national languages from Russian and to expand their use. After changing the flag, national anthems and coat of arms, which are the main symbols representing the independent state, the names of institutions, roads, streets and administrative terminology were changed. An attempt was made to create a terminology based on ancient Turkic language. After the independence, each republic accepted their national language as the official language and the language of education. In addition, the obligation to learn these national languages was introduced in all schools. As a result of these practices, the number of people who know national languages is increasing in these countries.

With the collapse of the USSR, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the five republics of the region were established, and nationalization processes started. However, the boundaries of these states were drawn without regard to ethnic realities, homogeneity and historical identities. After the independence in early 1990s, during the processes of nation and state building, because of these borders which were drawn with strategic and political purposes and irrelevance of land and ethnic group new problems emerged. The result of this effort, which Graham Fuller described as the ethnic engineering, was the emergence of a toxic mixture of local (tribal), national (ethnic), and religious connections. These practices deepened the differences between peoples and their identities in the region and the rising nationalism in the republics that gained independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union caused ethnic tension and competition among these republics. (Erler 2007: 138).

The linguistic policies that form the basis of the Soviet Union’s nationality policy have been designed as the most ambitious social engineering project of the Soviet power in respect to the covering its space and the ideology. However, the development of nations and national identities as an inter-

mediate stage in the process of creating communist society and the elimination of them in the final stage have not been achieved in Soviet times. The nationality policy of the Soviet Union, which contained dialectical contradictions such as pluralism/individualism, idealism/realism and nationalism/internationalism, led to the emergence of distinct nationalities and nations who internalized their differences in the process, instead of creating “*homo sovieticus*”. Thus, the process of distancing of the nations from each other as a result of nationalities policies which aimed at creating separate nations in the Soviet period despite their common past has continued after independence. (Musaoğlu 2009: 263).

Because the new nation-states were the product of Stalin’s nationality policy, the autocratic governance structure of the Soviet Union was influential on the nation and state building process in the Central Asian countries. At the present stage, the fact is that the nation-states in Central Asia, which are based on the authoritarian regime that developed and institutionalized in parallel with its birth, and its transformation are the main axes of the post-independence political and legal change.

## 2. Perception of Identity in Central Asia

The Central Asian people, which was culturally, ethnically, economically and occasionally politically connected to each other for centuries, was in search both in its foreign policies and internal political processes in order to preserve its existence in the globalization process that began with the end of the Cold War. In the early years of independence they were in the search for a direction in foreign policy, while in domestic politics they tried to create a variety of programs and laws to define their national identity. National culture, language, religion, literature, tradition and music, if necessary, shortly, all of these elements constitute national identity. Central Asian states needed an integration whether they it is cooperation in various fields among themselves or developing relations with external actors. In the first years of independence, high-level institutions and individuals of states advocated that this integration process first of all had to be based on national values. There was already a common sense of regional identity for Central Asia in the perception of the vast majority of external actors. The reasons for this are the similar political and economic trends, similar language, history and tradition, and consequently the same religion in the five republics of Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet system. The fact that the Central Asian republics are

bordering with Afghanistan left Russia and other countries in serious hesitation in terms of security especially due to the common shared religion in the region. Because the nations living in Central Asia, formerly perceived as Soviet citizens by external actors, were more likely to fall in to the influence of false religious movements in the process of reviving and accepting the once-forgotten Muslim identity. However, we should not ignore the fact that even during the Soviet regime religion was one of the important factors that keep the peoples of Central Asia together. Since this factor may disturb external actors in the post-independence period, the Central Asian republics prioritized the creation of national consciousness and state building prior to the definition of religious identity. Apart from this, regional states aimed to improve nationalism with state decisions. In this respect, language reforms and alphabet changes have been made.



When the issue of identity perception is analyzed in the Central Asian republics, foreign policy strategies of the regional countries and the political power of the states cannot be ignored. In particular, the perception of sub-identity and upper identity of the regional states is reflected in the decisions taken in foreign policy. Since the early years of independence, the competition between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the region has been included in this understanding of identity. The former President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, proposed to use the historical name of Turkestan in order to ensure the integrity of Central Asia and to construct the common identity. In this context, we see that the formation of an identity based on Turkic and Islamic identities supports Turanism. On the other hand, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev by introducing his Eurasianism argued that Central Asia is located at the intersection of Europe and Asia and supported that the regional identity was less Turkic and Muslim. (Laruel 2013: 7).

### 3. The Foundations of the Nation-State Building Process in Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan which is geographically located in the very center of Central Asia, is bordering with Kazakhstan in the north, with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the east, and Turkmenistan and Afghanistan in the south. The fact that the country is located between the rivers of Amuderya (Ceyhun) and Sirderya (Seyhun), which are strategically important, also increases its importance in the region. As the fastest developing country of Central Asia in terms of demography (Uzbekistan's population has been 32653.9 thousand according to the statistics of January 1, 2018 \*Uzbekistan Statistics Committee Official Data, 2018) Uzbekistan is becoming more attractive than other Central Asian republics. In Uzbekistan, which had a strong historical and cultural past such as the dynasty of Shaybanids and Timurids in the 15th and 16th centuries, there were state structures such as Hiva, Hokand and Bukhara Emirate. In the history, the state structure and identity perception of Uzbeks were mostly based on belief values. In post-independence Uzbekistan, it is possible to list a number of factors that affect the nation-state building process:

The fact that Fergana valley, which is considered to be "Middle East" of Central Asia is located in Uzbekistan and the majority of the people living there are ethnic Uzbeks is a factor affecting the state building process in the country. The valley, where approximately seven million people live, is the most densely populated region in Central Asia. The boundaries of the valley which are shared by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were drawn during the Soviet times in that way that after independence the ethnic conflicts emerge from time to time in the region. Because the majority of the ethnic groups living there were Uzbeks, Uzbekistan gave importance to this situation in its state policy.

Uzbekistan became the second Turkestan country that adopted on December 8, 1992 the new constitution after Turkmenistan in its post-independence history. The constitution was constantly criticized by the opposition because it increased the powers of the president and gave the president the right to appoint local governors who were directly affiliated with him. Because of the existence of an authoritarian regime in Uzbekistan, where stability and economic development come first than democratization, real opposition movements are not allowed and there is intense pressure upon them. (Ökmen 2013: 153)

After independence, the Uzbek regime preferred to build the nation-state structure on a conservative and patriarchal Uzbek identity. At the same time, the government tries to prevent the spread of radical Islam in the country by referring to the values that existed in the pre-Islamic Uzbek society and in particular to the local Sufi Islamic traditions. (Kavuncu 2014: 129) In other words, the Uzbek identity and Uzbekism were chosen as an alternative ideology and had a central position between state hegemony and cultural elements in the process of nation-state building. (Kavuncu 2014: 130).

Islam Karimov, a former Soviet Communist Party member, who was in rule in Uzbekistan, which declared its independence on September 1, 1991, gave importance to nationalism in the state structure of Uzbekistan. The choice of nationalism as a state ideology under the name of Uzbekism has enabled the Uzbek identity to evolve independently of other factors in the process of nation-state building. In 1996, the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, decided to change all the names of administrative places and streets in the country from the Soviet names to Uzbek. He renounced the Soviet names and changed them to the names of the Uzbek national and historical values. (Öztürk 2014: 73).

In the early years of independence, the position of Uzbek language in Uzbekistan was clearly determined when it was compared to other Central Asian republics national languages. For example, when in Kazakhstan the status of Kazakh language as a state language was the same and equal with the Russian language according to the Constitution, Uzbekistan has made an effort to remove Russian language beginning from the first period of independence. In 1995, the government of Uzbekistan signed the Language Law according to which the status of Russian as an inter-ethnic communication language was abolished. (Öztürk 2014: 73).

In Uzbekistan, we cannot ignore the religion as another factor that influences state building. The place of Islam in the internal political system of the state draws attention. For example, the fact that in the post-independence flag of Uzbekistan there is crescent, one of the important symbols of Islam, indicates the importance of religion in the state structure in Uzbekistan.

In Uzbekistan, it is possible to speak of two types of Islam in the political sense. The first one can be described as an "official Islam controlled by the state". The second one is "non-state Islam" which is defined as anti-Uzbek governmental. (Çaman 2014: 13). The role of the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement in Uzbekistan's post-independence re-

ligious life has been prominent. The organization which was officially founded in the 1998 has been effective throughout 1990s. The most of the armed staff of the organization were consist of figures who fought against the Russians in Afghanistan between 1979-1989. The aim of the organization was to establish an independent Islamic state in Central Asia after the Islamist militants won the war against the Soviet Union and the collapse of the USSR. They proclaimed jihad against the government of Karimov. For these reasons, Uzbekistan has adopted a moderate Islamic policy in the country, leaving the religious factor in the last place. Because of the geographic location and history of the country Islam is seen as a threatening factor which can trigger the organization of the radical Islamic groups in the country as an anti-governmental power which threatens the stability not only of the country but also of the whole region.

In general, the role of the former President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov in the state-building process was very great. He applied the traditionalist system he designed as an Uzbek model in every activity of the state. He chose to isolate the state from regional and global developments as a strategy against internal and external threats, and presented this process as part of "the Uzbek Model". As in other Central Asian republics, Karimov's speeches and discourses were accepted as the main reference in the process of the de-Sovietization and the rebuilding the Uzbek national identity. The Uzbek leader frequently emphasized the historical references and the Uzbekism. (Oğan 2016, <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/kerimov-ozbek-tipi-demokrasinin-mimari>)

## Conclusion

In Central Asian countries, nationalization and nation-state building have not been realized only by their internal dynamics. According to identity understanding of nations living in the region, there is a general need for regional identity as the common Soviet identity which had been imposed during the Soviet times disappeared with the dissolution of the union. This need was more felt by external actors. The fact that during the Soviet period the outside actors defined regional people as Central Asian Muslims the post-independence period seemed to strengthen their Islamic identity. However, when international terrorism has began to be associated with Islam, Central Asian countries have realized that the new states should be established only on the basis of their national/ethnic identities. The best example of this is Uzbekistan. During the globalization process,

under the leadership of Kerimov Uzbekistan was able to protect the Uzbek identity from the influence of external factors. It was able to successfully complete the process of building a more self-confident nation-state than other states in Central Asia, by decreasing to minimum the influence of Russia on Uzbekistan's foreign policy decisions or internal political life. If we consider the fact that the Russian lobby is still influential in decision-making in other regional countries, we come to conclusion that Uzbekistan has taken the most important steps as a nation. In addition, while

the process of globalization on the one hand, and regionalization or regional integration movements on the other are the indispensable necessities of the international system, Uzbekistan has formed a strong ground or "immunity" against the processes which can threaten the existence of the Uzbek nation and nation-state. After the new President of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyev came to power, he deepened the relations with the regional states and showed interest in regional integrations and opened up new pages in the history of Uzbekistan.

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